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Chapter 6 section 1 a

THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CIRCUIT RIDER – Dr. John Craig

" Of the persons most prominent in the early history of our pioneer ancestry, special mention should be made of Dr. John Craig, for the reason that he exerted so much telling influence upon the immediate lives of those persons who pioneered the counties of POcahontas, Greenbrier, Monroe and Kanawha. He is moreover a type of the persons whose names were embalmed by so many of our ancestors with all their hearts could give, "their praises and their tears."

Dr. Craig was a Master of Arts by graduation from the University of Edinburg, Scotland. For twenty-five years he ministered to the Old Stone Church, in Augusta county(Lewisburg) walking five miles to preach Sabbath morning, and when Indians were troublesome would carry his own trusty rifle along with Bible and Psalm Book. Services would begin at 10a.m., recess for one hour for lunch at noon, then preaching until sundown. Sometimes on Sacramental occasions, a candle was needed to read the closing hymn. Then some of the congregation would ride ten or twelve miles to their homes, and after doing up the household chores, would go to bed at midnight. One of his sermons still extant is laid off in fifty-five divisions.

When Braddock was defeated, mainly by the skillful managment of Pontiac in 1754, thus leaving all west of the Blue Ridge Mountains exposed to Indian incursions, the inhabitants in utter consternation were talking about flight somewhere back to Pennsylvania

or over the mountains toward Williamsburg, so as to be near the seat of government, and the safety it implied, The undaunted preacher was opposed to all such schemes. In his journal he thus writes:

" I oppose that scheme as a scandal to our nation, falling below our brave ancestors, (in Scotland) making ourselves a reproach among Virginians, a dishonor to our friends at home, an evidence of cowardice, want of faith and noble Christian dependance on God as able to save and deliver from the heathen; and withal a lasting blot forever on all our posterity. "

This valiant old soldier of two banners,-the banner of the Cross, and the banner of civil and religious freedom,-advised the erection of forts. In his journal he writes: "My own flock required me to go before them in the work, which I did cheerfully, though it cost me one-third of my estate; but the people followed me and my congregation in less than two months was well fortified."

There are a number of people living in Pocahontas today whose ancestors assisted in the erection of the forts referred to. With such an example, his people maintained their homes most bravely through all of the fiery trials of that period so eventful in results, as far reaching as the civilized world and even to the regions beyond. What remains of this beave patriots recorded views indicates that his was a mind characterized by keen, practical sagacity, generous sentiments, and judicious magnificence of reasoning powers. Hence it was he correctly appreciated the actual needs, advantages, perils and prospects of his surroundings.

Obtuse indeed must be one who fails to perceive something splendid, wonderful in such a man, guided as he had been by a dream in Ireland to his place of service in the wilds of the Virginia Valley. Before leaving Ireland, and while frequently praying for Divine guidance where to go, he had a dream that profoundly impressed him, and it was ever vivid in his memory. After coming to America he followed the stream of immigration up the valley of Virginia until he came to Fort Defiance, a locality that corresponded to his dream. He at once selected it as a place for his home, where he dwelt, labored, died and was buried. Honored for all time be his memory. May his example of life and faith like all " the actions of the just,

Smell sweet and blossom in the dust."

The people upon whom such influences of living and practicing were exerted, and from whose habitations invincible defenders went to vanquish foemen like Pontiac, Logan and Cornstalk, and famous generals from Europe, were mainly of Scotch-Irish extraction. The Scottish-Virginians came for the most part because there was a fascination in the roominess and liberty that a new realm promises. Moreover there was something attractive for such inquisitive, daring people in the adventures and dangers that abounded.

And they remained the same unyielding characters, whether contending for Christ and His covenant in the old world among the Grampian Hills, or reclaiming the Alleghanies of the new. Unrestrained by redeeming grace, these people were of fiery temperment free-and-easy, sportloving, gallant, fighting at the drop of a hat, racing horses, playing at cards, indulging in whiskey freely as water, swearing with an emphasis and rhetorical jingle truly surprising. With their faults nevertheless, they were endowed

with resplendent virtues of personal character and when individuals became pious it was not half-way doings with them.

In their religion the Pauline phase had precedence, and so they believed and were sure that God abhors sin with no degree of allowance and deals sternly and righteously with unrepentant sinners. Their belief in the Devine sovereignty was as much to imbue them with that unrelenting persistence under difficulties that so eminently prepared them for the part they were led by Providential guidance to perform, in subdueing the pathless wilderness and forming new states.

The mothers were keepers at home, teaching the children and the servants the catechism, and attending church once a month, more or less as oportunity presented itself. These robust, home loving, sweet-souled ladies wrote no books, recited no poems nor read essays, yet were none the less fitted to do their all important part in placing deep and firmly the foundations of the institutions, civil and religious that are the precious heirlooms of their descendants.

The compiler of these Pocahontas sketches will remember seein and hearing of parties in his younger days, who brought their love affairs to a happy understanding by the means of the hymn book or the Bible. One morning before services began in one of the oldest o the Valley churches a youthful, enamored member politely handed his hymn book to a lady friend in the pew just before him, with a pin stuck in the stanza he wished her to read. Whereupon she read these significant words: " Let the sweet hope that thou art mine

My life and death attend,

Thy presence through my journey shine
And crown my journeys end."

The young lady in place of blushing and whispering"This is so sudden," took another plan, for she seemed to know at once of a hymn thatt would meet the emergency in kind and enable her to give as good as he had sent. Returning the book with the selfsame pin for a pointer, he read therein as follows:

" All that I am and all that I have
Shall be forever thine.
Whate'er my duty bids me give
My willing hands resign."

Where now may be seen beautiful farms and substantial houses were once the log cabin, the linsey-wolsey, the short govn, the hunting shirts, the pack horse, the simple living, the deer and the rifle, the fields of flax, the loom and spinning wheel; and with them the strict attention to going to church, the reading of the Bible, and keeping Sabbath from the beginning to the end of the day; the singing if hymns and sacred songs, all blended to present a beautiful picture of enterprise; economy, and religion in laying the foundation of society.

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